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PRIEST AND PROPHET IN THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

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The ancient and everlasting controversy between the priest and the prophet was apparently settled forever in the Protestant churches by the conditions of their beginning. Having their origin and main reason for existence in a revolt against the priest, they seemed permanently safe from all peril of priestcraft.

The older Protestant churches, whose separate history dates from the Reformation, met the priest in his sacerdotal vestments and contended with him frankly and bitterly, prophet against priest. They were commonly worsted in the encounter, but they found their revenge and recompense and reward in the success of their revolt and in the establishment of their own independent organizations.

The subsequent separations, divisions, and subdivisions have turned less evidently, but no less actually, upon this point of difference. There have been rebellions of prophets against priests. Both sides have appeared to agree in hating priests; but one side has taken the priestly position, and the other side has protested. Thus there have been Presbyterian priests and Baptist priests and Quaker priests, all of whom would have repudiated with indignation the suggestion that they were akin to priests of Rome, but who have nevertheless been of the priestly temper and have looked upon truth from the priestly point of view. Everybody remembers how William Blackstone, the first settler of Boston, whom Winthrop found in solitary possession of the three hills, retreated into Rhode Island before the invading Puritans, remarking that, having left England to escape "my lords, the bishops," he must now leave Boston to escape "my lords, the brethren." He found no great difference between these two companies of dominant persons, except that, of the two, the brethren were the more objectionable.

That is, in almost every Protestant communion there have been men who have had the theory and the temper of the priest, and have behaved themselves accordingly; and over against them have risen in opposition other men who have had the spirit of the prophet. Almost every schism is a chapter in the controversy between the prophet and the priest. In almost every trial for heresy it is the priest who sits in the seat of the judge and pronounces the sentence of condemnation on the prophet. The sentence may be just and necessary; the prophet may be a false prophet; but the essential distinction is that the priest is the advocate of the institution, the maintainer of the old ways and of uniformity; while the prophet is the advocate of the individual, the orator of change, of progress, and of liberty.

The prophet has never succeeded in his endeavor to eliminate the priest. It is interesting and instructive to follow the controversy in the pages of history, and to perceive how one campaign is like another. There are great differences in the details of the debate, and the fortunes of one side and of the other rise and fall with the issue of a skirmish or a battle; but the general aspect of the contention remains from age to age. Neither side has succeeded in gaining an abiding advantage.

In the Old Testament, for example, where the struggle assumes large proportions, and is perhaps the most obvious fact in the whole history, the prophet has the best of it, at first. He rises up against the priest, in strong indignation, and seems to have the people with him. He is in every case a finer, higher, more able and more righteous man than his opponent. He is the joy and pride of all Protestants. The prophet is essentially a Protestant. That is his principle, his inspiration, and his business. In every subsequent debate his words have been the text of Protestant sermons: "Incense is an abomination unto me: the new moon and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble to me; I am weary to bear them." This is the characteristic denunciation of the prophet, in all times and in all places. "Wash you, make you clean: put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well."

This is the characteristic proclamation in all lands, of the message of the prophet.

The men who brought this message are almost the only men whose names are familiar to us, outside of the catalogue of kings, in the history of the Jewish people. It is true that Jehoida, the priest, leads the court conspiracy against Queen Athaliah, and that Joshua, the priest, is exalted and blessed in the prophecy of Zechariah; but for the most part the priests are a crowd of servile persons, formalists, obscurantists, and worse; over against whom, pointing to them with the finger of scorn, stands the prophet.

In the New Testament, especially in the gospels, the Pharisees are joined with the priests. The two parties were as antagonistic as the Protestant and the papal sections of our present Christianity; and the lines of cleavage followed very much the same distinction. The priests were the men of the church, the Pharisees were the men of the meeting-houses; the priests emphasized the sacrificial, the Pharisees the practical, elements of religious service; and so on. But they were united in their opposition to our Lord, as he was in opposition to them both. In their essential spirit they were all priests together, the Pharisee with the Sadducee; for they all stood on the basis of precedent, of conservatism, and of authority; in one way or another, they all exalted the institution.

Christ was a prophet, and sent his apostles to be prophets. When the ruler of the synagogue rebuked him for healing on the sabbath, the eternal difference between priest and prophet stood out plain. The ruler was intent on the interests of the institution; Christ cared immediately for the interests of the individual. When he said, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath," he stated the perpetual antithesis between the two kinds of men; each of them honest, each of them religious, each of them desiring to serve God, but temperamentally different one from the other. Christ gave the priest the respect which was due to his position; he was no more a partisan Protestant than he was a partisan socialist. Nevertheless, he was a Protestant. The departure of the Christians out of the established church—divinely established—and their organization of themselves into a dissenting, Protestant company, was the direct, logical, and inevitable result of the teachings of Jesus. Paul was the

Luther of the movement, but he had the mind of Christ. It may profitably be remembered that from the point of view of the Jewish church to this day all Catholics are Protestants, and the pope himself is but a dissenting minister.

The whole Christian church, then, began as a Protestant body, in the spirit of Him who taught the central principle of Protestantism, that the individual is of more value than the institution. The apostles, and the leaders and teachers who followed them, were prophets; that is, they were men who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. In place of the ancient phrase, "It is written"—the formula of priests—they said, with a confidence which amazes us to this day: "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us." They had no use for priests. It is true that very early a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith: but they all repented before they joined the Christian church: that was a part of their obedience. The Christian church started Protestant, and was persecuted in consequence by all the priests.

But the mind of the new movement changed. If the writing of the New Testament had continued for several centuries, as was the case with the Old, we should have had a curious and significant parallel. Suppose it had extended far enough to take in St. Cyprian. We should then have had the record of a gradual change such as took place among the Jews. The prophets before the exile, with their denunciation of forms and formalism, with their abuse of priests, were so far forgotten or disregarded that after the exile the priests came quietly back and assumed again their old places of power. Indeed, they were more powerful than ever. The prophets were dumb. John the Baptist broke a silence which had lasted for centuries. And so it was with Christendom. The church which began without a priest—save Him who is the great high-priest—which began in protest against priestliness, both sacerdotal and pedagogical, presently beheld itself under obedience to a whole hierarchy, ruled by priests and glad to have it so. Says the author of *The Creed of Christ*:

By the time the church had been fully organized, the whole diameter of thought separated Christianity from the mind of Christ. Everything that Christ valued most, with the exception of such sentiments and rules of life as devotion to his person had forced upon the conscience of Christendom, had either been ignored

or proscribed. Everything that Christ hated most had been accepted, systematized, and authoritatively taught. . . . The externalism, the ceremonialism, the literalism, the materialism, the false asceticism, the exclusiveness, the uncharitableness of the Jews had entered into the life-blood of Christianity.

These chapters of history are, of course, sufficiently familiar to all reflective persons who have a habit of reading. I have recalled them because they are the background against which all present discussion of priests and prophets stands. They interpret, if we know how to get their meaning, the present situation. They teach us, at least, that the priest and the prophet are permanent persons in religion. And thereby they warn us against the error into which both the priest and the prophet have persistently fallen: the error of imagining each for himself that he is the friend and the other is the foe of the truth and of the church. Each has tried to put the other out. Each has denounced the other as disloyal and deceitful and desperately wicked. Each has burned the other at the stake. But, as I said, neither has succeeded in his endeavor at elimination. Though for the moment the priest silences the prophet, the line of prophets continues. Though for the moment the prophet unseats the priest, the succession of priests perseveres. The meaning is that, though each in turn may be wrong, and dangerously wrong, each is nevertheless substantially right. Each stands for an abiding element in religion. Each ministers to his own side of a human nature, which is of divine ordering and is unchanged with the changing centuries. The two religious forces are different, as the centripetal and the centrifugal forces in nature are different; they are opposed one to the other. But they are equally essential.

For example, in politics there is an ancient and unending contention as to the proper residence of power. Shall it be in one hand, centralized; or shall it be in many hands, distributed? One is the theory of monarchy, the other is the theory of democracy. One at its worst leads to tyranny, the other at its worst leads to anarchy. But, as the world goes, every monarchy tends toward democracy, and every republic toward monarchy. We perceive today, within the circle of contemporary observation, how in Russia, the most monarchical of civilized states, the tendency sets toward the distribution of power; while in the United States, the most democratic of nations,

power is becoming more and more centralized. But the centralization of power is an emphasis on the institution, and that is the characteristic position of the priest, who has always allied himself with princes; while the distribution of power is an emphasis on the individual, and that is the distinctive position of the prophet, who has always been on the side of the people. The healthy state, whose public opinion is in accord with conscience, whose political condition is sound and progressive, and which is at once sufficiently conservative and sufficiently progressive, is that in which the two tendencies have each fair play, and are pretty evenly balanced, and act each as a salutary check upon the other. That is the benefit of a party of the administration and a party of the opposition. That is the advantage of a Republican party, holding to the supremacy of the Union, fronted by a Democratic party, maintaining the sovereignty of each individual state. They are both necessary to our welfare.

The point is that we cannot get along without the priest. There is no need to argue the everlasting value of the prophet. All who read this paper are agreed as to that. There is no need to dwell further on the bad side of the priest. That also may be taken for granted. Neither am I disposed to urge the prophet to approve of the priest to such an extent of brotherly appreciation and confidence that he will give over his ancient task of observing him with suspicion. It is the distinctive and unalterable business of the prophet to watch the priest. The priest will magnify his office if he can. That is his nature. That is the evidence of all history. He must be kept in check. Before we know it he will have us shut up behind the bars of ecclesiastical and theological convention, our hands tied with rubrics and our feet with canons. He has a passion for uniformity, and will serve us, if he can, as the giant served those whom he bound upon his iron bed: if their legs were too long, he cut off their feet; if they were too short, he stretched them out; he made them fit the bed.

But uniformity is not so bad, if it does not go too far. Indeed, within limits, it is necessary to all orderly living. There must be customs to which people shall give deference, and some of the more serious customs must be enforced by laws to which people shall give obedience. And to these ends there must be lawyers and police-

men, there must be magistrates and books of statutes. And this is true in religion. The priest—he may or may not wear a chasuble; the clothes do not make him, the ordination does not make him—the priest is the man who is interested in the steady maintenance of ecclesiastical order. Constitutions and by-laws, the selection of officers and their duties, the continuance of a regular succession, the settlement of questions of precedence, the securing of obedience, the prevention or punishment of schism—all these things are of vital concern to him. This side of life is dreary enough to the mystic, and irksome to the enthusiast, and displeasing to the prophet; but it is as desirable as bread, water, air to breathe, and earth to tread upon. It is a part of the discipline of religion, without which religion lapses into eccentricity.

When the prophets and their disciples made their great protest and came out of the ancient institution into an independent life, and thereby turned their backs on the priests and all which the priests most cared for, they went naturally into a reactive departure from the old law and order. That was to be expected. It showed itself at Münster, in ways which are not pleasant to remember, and the revelation injured the progress of the reforming movement. Sober men, perceiving what may happen when the prophets are free from restraints of the priests, drew back from such a condition of license. Münster was the prophets' paradise, and it proved to be a pandemonium. That was happily checked, and Protestantism was saved from being a religion of misrule. But the new independence had the defects of its qualities. Beginning as a schism, it was unable to maintain consistently that schism is a sin. Started as a protest against oppressive and misdirected authority, it found difficulty in maintaining even a reasonable and necessary authority. Whoever disagreed with his neighbors said easily, "I will start a new church for myself," and was able to plead the Protestant worthies as examples. Thus Protestantism is fissiparous. The catalogue of sects is amazing, partly by reason of the length of the list of names, partly by reason of the insignificance of many of the grounds of difference.

The Protestant churches are therefore in need of the services of priests; that is, of men who have the sacerdotal sense of order, and the instinct of centralization, and a high esteem of the value of the

institution. Such men, accordingly, are appearing at this moment. They are urging, and sometimes effecting, the union or reunion of separated churches. They are introducing into the congregational order a saving element of episcopacy. The president of the Unitarian Association is substantially an archbishop, and goes about on visitations confirming the churches, like a working prelate. Dr. Bradford and Dr. Gladden have rendered a like service to the Congregationalists, issuing pastoral letters, like a House of Bishops. These are significant tokens of a change of mind. They mean that individualism feels the need of institutionalism. The prophet summons the priest. And the priest, so far as he can, brings into the ecclesiastical confusion the same sort of order that is brought into business by the general manager. He looks after the general interests. He attends to the rubrics and to the canons. He restrains eccentricity, puts enthusiasm in harness, gets the brethren to work together soberly and with self-restraint for great ends. The need of the Protestant churches for this kind of control is plain enough. Protestantism as an ecclesiastical system—or lack of system—is out of accord with the dominant tendencies of modern life, and lies in a foolish eddy by the shore while the main current sweeps on toward the sea. The modern man, in his commercial and political and social relations, is bent on economy and effectiveness of effort by elimination of needless and wasteful competition. He is getting together with his neighbors, merging his individual interests in the welfare of the institution; and both the individual and the institution are prospering in consequence. The modern man is intent on large things. The Protestant churches have been content with small things. They have frittered away their energies in a duplication and multiplication of parishes and churches which has kept them poor, discouraged many young men of the first class from entering their ministry, and weakened their whole work. That is what the priest says; and the prophet contemplating the Seven Churches of Lonelyville assents, with penitence.

The priest represents, not only the instinct of order, but the instinct of worship. He cares much for the beauty and dignity of the public service of the church; delights in noble buildings, with aspiring steeples and stained windows, and the work of the artist in wood and

metal; and in the stately sanctuaries which he builds he would have praise and prayer befitting the place, as both place and prayer befit his conception of the glory and the majesty of God. To him a church which is beneath the level of the standards of the best people of the parish is an unworthy house of God. A church whose adornments suggest the parlor of a boarding-house or the furnishing of a Pullman car recalls to the priest a text from Genesis, wickedly perverted: "How dreadful is this place!" And a service which is in harmony with such a structure, with operatic singing of anthems taken from the prayer-book at random, and with extemporaneous prayers in which the personality of the preacher obtrudes itself indecently upon the mind of the worshiper, is offensive both to the priest and to everybody who has any appreciativeness of the side of life for which he stands. Many of the Protestant churches have no idea how cold, barren, impoverished, and depressing their services are to persons who are accustomed to a liturgy. They are intolerable.

This is due, of course, in large part to an inheritance of tradition. When the Protestant churches began, they turned their backs, not only on the priests, but on everything which could remind them that priests existed. That was natural enough. But it was a temporary situation. Human nature has always demanded that which a rich and noble service supplies. It will never be satisfied with the sermon only. In most of the Protestant churches, until within a few years, the acts of worship have been "preliminary exercises," preparatory to the sermon. People have been expected to go to church to hear sermons. The prophet has had his own way, and prophesying—for this is the old word for preaching—has been made the one reason for church attendance. The consequence is that in the non-liturgical churches attendance has decreased deplorably. The prophet has had a monopoly of the situation and he has shown that he is unable to maintain the interest or the loyalty of the congregation. The honest truth is that, if his sermon is the only reason for church-going, it is not worth going for. We have got a better one at home, in a book.

The Protestant churches need the aid of priests, to help them to minister to the inevitable instinct of worship. When one sees sur-

pliced choirs in Universalist churches, and is invited to join with Unitarians in daily services, and looks into the Presbyterian *Book of Common Worship*, he perceives that the priest has appeared upon the scene. He has come none too soon. Before the Reformation the people were not admonished and instructed enough, and they were hungry for sermons. Since the Reformation there have been too many sermons, and the soul of the people is weary to hear them. What we want now is a chance to say our prayers and sing our praises, and to worship and adore Him who has promised his special presence in the midst of us. We want to go to church thinking of God, not of the preacher. This privilege the priest makes possible.

The most influential of all the Old Testament prophets was Ezekiel. Some of the others were much better preachers, but he was at the same time a prophet and a priest. He saw both sides; the need of the old and the need of the new, the time to destroy and the time to upbuild, the place of sacrifice and the place of mercy, in human society. And he enacted lasting institutions. Moses made the Jews a nation; Ezekiel, when the nation was shattered, made them a church. He carried them over across the tremendous crisis. The Protestant churches are ready now for the spirit of Ezekiel, and have a welcome for men who to the enthusiasm of the prophet add the discipline of the priest. We need priests, for order, for worship—but the priests need to be watched.